The Revival of *Renga* Poetry in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract: Renga 連歌 or 'linked verse' is a form of collaborative poetry in which the participants of a circle alternately contribute verses and thus create a poem together. The art has a history that extends over a millennium if we include its earliest forms, but the tradition was abandoned throughout the country in the nineteenth century – with one probable exception. Since the 1980s, however, revival movements have begun to reintroduce and spread the practice again. As a result, *renga* circles are now held again in many parts of Japan. In the course of producing a poem this way, it is also recorded in writing. In addition, clean copies in calligraphic writing are often made after the gatherings, many of which are, like the performances themselves, meant as an offering presented to the deities of shrines and temples in a votive ceremony. While the poetic rules and the structure of the written records follow patterns that go back to the fourteenth century, other pre-modern elements like the high degree of rituality have given way to freer forms of performance. Drawing partly on findings from a research trip to Japan in the summer of 2018,[2] this paper discusses how balancing tradition and innovation on the one hand and specifically promoting and teaching *renga* on the other have been effective in preserving the heritage of *renga* as a cultural technique, including the writing of *renga* manuscripts.

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2 During this field trip, many people in Tokyo, Tsukuba, Osaka, Sakai, Yamaguchi, Gujō Hachiman (Gifu) and Yukuhashi (Fukuoka) were very supportive. Although they are too numerous to be named here, I would nevertheless like to express my sincere gratitude to all of them.

生駒山色濃く薫る若葉かな　　きよの
Ikomayama / iro koku ka(w)oru / wakaba kana[3]　Kiyono
At Mount Ikoma the scent of young leaves' deep colours　Kiyono

雨雲の下飛ぶつばめのこ　　令子
Amagumo no shita / tobu tsubame no ko　Reiko
Swallows' chicks fly beneath the rain clouds　Reiko

荒磯海はてなく波は重なりて　　昌子
Ariso umi / hatenaku nami wa / kasanarite　Masako
Waves from afar keep beating the the rough sea's shore　Masako

The first three verses of a forty-four-verse *renga* composed at the Hirano branch of Osaka Municipal Library in the summer of 2018.

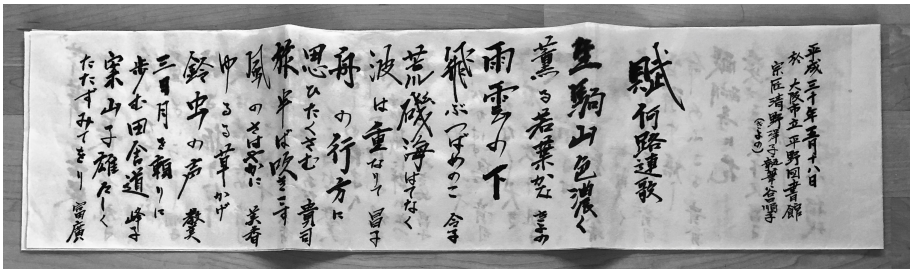

Fig. 1: The *renga* manuscript containing the three verses quoted above. Calligraphy by Taniguchi Junko 谷口順子 (2018), who also acted as the scribe when this *renga* was being composed. The title of the poem is *Fusu nani michi renga* 賦何路連歌 ('Insert-what-path *renga*').[4] Photo: © Buck-Albulet, 2020.

3 In *renga*, historical orthography is used. *Kaoru* ('to scent'), for example, would be written *kaworu* かをる in *kana* but pronounced *kaoru*.

4 The entitling practice in *renga* developed out of a language-game technique called *fushimono* ('include [a required] word'). According to the rules, a word in the first verse (*hokku*) has to correspond with the word following (or preceding) *nani*, or 'what', which has the function of a placeholder. The title may be translated less literally as 'Replace "what" with a word that forms a compound with "path" *renga*'. In the first verse, the word *yama*, or 'mountain', is used, which can be combined with 'path' to form the composite expression 'mountain path'. The *fushimono* technique is a relic from the time when *renga* had more ludic qualities. The practice has actually been reversed for a long time: first of all, the *hokku* is submitted and then the title is determined, like in a riddle where the answer is provided first and then the question has to be found.

Introduction

One of the basic facts about *renga* poetry and other forms of linked verse[5] – and one of the most underestimated points about it as well – is that it generally[6] arises from group activities.[7] This means that like other literary traditions in Japan, *renga* has always been more than mere poetry. As an 'art of the place' (*ba no geinō* 場の芸能) or 'art of the meeting place' (*za no geinō* 座の芸能), it brings people together who enjoy the challenge of composing verses in classical Japanese and interacting (*yoriai* 寄合) with other participants in this creative way, not to mention the chain of constantly changing images in the poem that arise from these interactions. The three verses quoted above serve as an example of how two consecutive verses (1 and 2, 2 and 3, etc.) can produce this shift of images in the respective semantic two-verse units. The meaning of each verse is altered, too, depending on whether it is read together with the preceding verse or the following one.

A typical *renga* circle consists of a *renga* master (*sōshō* 宗匠), who supervises and guides the procedure, a scribe (*shuhitsu* 執筆), who assists the *sōshō* and makes the official record of the poem, and the group (*renjū* 連衆), i.e. the other participants. As is indicated by this role allocation, the poem is recorded in writing as it arises through the interaction of the participants. In the medieval *renga*, the scribe was the only one to sit at a low table (*bundai* 文台) and record the poem as it was created using a brush, ink and 'renga paper' (*renga kaishi* 連歌懐紙).[8] By contrast, as will be explained shortly, in contemporary *renga* circles, every member takes notes, and modern writing utensils have replaced brush and ink (with a few exceptions). The calligraphy in the *kaishi* depicted in fig. 1, following the traditional form of a medieval manuscript, was written after the *renga* session.

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5 Variants of linked poetry are the pre-modern *wakan rengu* 和漢聯句, a form in which verses in classical Japanese alternate with verses in Chinese, *haikai no renga* 俳諧の連歌, a form that allows a broader range of vocabulary and themes, and *renku* 連句, the modern form of *haikai no renga*. For more on *rengu*, see XIE 2016 and 2017. *Waka* poetry, from which *renga* evolved, was often composed at ritual social gatherings.

6 Solitary *renga*, which are known as *dokugin*, are also possible. In the past, they were mainly created for practice or as votive gifts.

7 One of the rare examples of an academic paper in a Western language focusing on performative aspects of *renga* is HORTON 1993. See also EBERSOLE 1983.

8 *Kaishi* literally means 'chest paper' because it was kept in the chest of one's clothing. Initially, the term referred to sheets of paper that were used for various purposes; in *waka* poetry, for example, it was used for recording and presenting or dedicating *waka* poems and it also referred to the paper on which the *waka* was written.

A *renga* performance contains elements of a ritual and a game or play.[9] Parts of it are competitive in that members of the group may each submit a verse to follow the current one, and the best proposal is jointly chosen by the master and the scribe.

The metric structure of a *renga* is formed by the alternation of longer verses (*chōku* 長句) of 17 or 5-7-5 syllables or morae and shorter verses (*tanku* 短句) of 14 or 7-7 morae. One *chōku* and one *tanku* would yield a *waka*,[10] the most traditional genre of Japanese poetry, from which *renga* evolved as a short *renga* or *tanrenga* 短連歌. The most common form of *renga* in the medieval era was the one-hundred-verse form or *hyakuin* 百韻 (i.e. fifty units each consisting of a *chōku* and a *tanku*), but there were also *renga* with thirty-six (*kasen* 歌仙), forty-four (*yoyoshi* 四吉), fifty (or 'half of one hundred', *han hyakuin* 判百韻), one thousand (*senku* 千句) and even ten-thousand (*manku* 万句) verses.

A genre of poetry and a performance of a literary art, *renga* is based on a set of poetic rules (*shikimoku* 式目) concerning the motifs and themes that are to be used in the verses. These rules specify how often a certain expression or the thing or matter represented by it may appear in a single poem, session or page, and they define the number of verses by which two expressions belonging to the same category have to be separated, how long a certain subject can be continued in consecutive verses, and various other points.[11]

The pre-modern *renga* was based on the language of court poetry. Contemporary *renga* is not composed in modern Japanese, but in classical – or rather what might be called neo-classical – Japanese. This includes the use of pre-modern forms of inflexion (e.g. *afur**u**ru* instead of modern *afur**e**ru*, meaning 'to overflow') as well as historical orthography (たまづさ instead of modern たまずさ for *tamazusa* or 'love letter', 'precious letter') and the exclusion of Sino-Japanese words (modern *gaikoku* 外国 or 'foreign country', for example, would be read as *totsukuni*), colloquial speech, and loanwords in other languages, which would be written in *katakana*. These rules are not always followed consistently, however. As will be explained below, there are different rules on the inner part of the *renga* as well, but despite

9 See EBERSOLE 1983 and BUCK-ALBULET 2021 (forthcoming) on the ritual elements in pre-modern *renga*.

10 The modern form of the 31-mora poem is called *tanka*.

11 See below for more details. Also see HIROKI 2006: 46. For a description of the poetic rules in the medieval era, see CARTER 1983.

this great complexity regarding the form of *renga*, the poetic ideal of the language to be used in *renga* is actually one of elegance (*fūga* 風雅), as in traditional court poetry.[12]

In 1983, Steven Carter published a paper entitled 'Rules, rules, and more rules'. Although he only deals with the poetic rules (*shikimoku* 式目) in the medieval era in this article, the wording of the title aptly describes a central feature of the art in general, namely its being permeated by rules and guidelines in every aspect, extending – in the case of the pre-modern *renga* – to rules on performance (*sahō* 作法) and a detailed description of how the scribe should act (for example, how to handle one's desk (*bundai sabaki* 文台捌き), rules about how to do the inscription on the *kaishi* (*kaishi kakiyō* 懐紙書様) as well as rules on 'ritual decency'[13] that apply to every member of the circle. Poetic rules are important in contemporary *renga*, too, of course, but rules on ritual decency demanding concern and considerateness (*omoiyari*) towards each other from the participants are by no means obsolete. The primer *Minna de yomō renga* みんなで詠もう連歌 ('Let us compose *renga* altogether')[14] lists thirteen rules that say the participants should not be late, for example, and not talk loudly while others are thinking. They also describe behaviour that is undesirable, like beginners sitting next to the *sōshō* and the scribe.[15] On the other hand, in 2018 when some *renga* masters told me 'there are no rules', what they meant was that the strict rules on the performance of medieval and early-modern *renga* sessions do not apply to contemporary *renga* in general, but are simply a matter of convention in local circles. As in other 'arts of the place' and other kinds of gatherings, however, *renga* performances still follow certain traditional conventions. Those that extend to rules of composition may also be set by these local circles. The 'procedure [to be followed]' (*shidai* 次第) for an Imai[16] *hyakuin* in Yuku-

12 DAI JŪKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 59.

13 Cf. the German expression 'ritueller Anstand', a term coined by KRACHT in 1998. A more detailed discussion of rules of conduct also drawing on Kracht's findings is given in Buck-Albulet 2021 (forthcoming). For further information on this subject, see KINSKI 2013 (specialising in table manners) and RÜTTERMANN 2011 (specialising in the etiquette of letter-writing). A good description of the connection between *renga* and ritual decency can be found in HIROKI 2006: 191–284 with details of rules of conduct (*sahō* 作法).

14 See below.

15 YUKUHASHI SHI BUNKA ISAN KASSEIKA JIKKŌ IINKAI 2014: 16–17.

16 The area in the city of Yukuhashi (Fukuoka prefecture) where Susa Jinja Shrine is located.

hashi, for example, has rules that decide where *haikai* or *renku* vocabulary (*haigon* 俳言) may be used in the poem or how the verses are to be submitted vocally.[17]

The history of *renga*

The beginnings of Japanese linked poetry can be traced back to the Heian period (794–1185). *Tanrenga* or 'short renga' was practiced initially, which only consists of two verses. The emergence of 'long renga' (*chōrenga*) can be dated to the twelfth century. The genre developed considerably over time, adopting various forms and styles[18] according to the poetry's content, length, the occasion, motive or purpose, or the place and social setting while retaining its basic structure once it was established. In the beginning, *renga* was more like a parlour game, but took shape as an art from the thirteenth century onwards.[19] The first 'specialists' or *rengashi* 連歌師 (*renga* masters)[20] appeared on the stage of history as early as the middle of that century.

17 SUSA JINJA RENGA NO KAI 1997: 8.

18 On the development of *renga* from a parlour game to a serious art, see NAUMANN 1967, MINER 1979, TSURUSAKI 2000: 32–58 and CARTER 2016, among others. The different kinds of *renga* are covered especially well in FUKUI 1930: 262–80. A brief taxonomy can also be found in BUCK-ALBULET 2021 (forthcoming). On *tanrenga* ('short *renga*') as an early form, see SHIMAZU 1961, among others.

19 According to Shimazu Tadao in KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2005: 26, Konishi Jin'ichi distinguished three peaks in the history of *renga*, corresponding to the eras of the famous *renga* masters Nijō Yoshimoto 二条良基 (1320–88), Iio Sōgi 飯尾 宗祇 (1421–1502) and Satomura Jōha 里村紹巴 (1525–1602). Ikeda Tomizō refers to classifications by Kaneko Kinjirō, Ichiji Tetsuo 伊地知鉄男 and Shimazu Tadao: Kaneko distinguishes an 'era of rise' (*bokkō jidai* 勃興時代) from 1087 to 1221, an 'era of growth' (*seiiku jidai* 生育時代) from 1221 to 1334, an 'era of establishment (*kakuritsu jidai* 確立時代) from 1334 to 1467, and the 'golden era' (*kyokusei jidai* 極盛時代) from 1467 to 1601. Ichiji Tetsuo distinguished seven phases from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, ending with Sōgi. Shimazu Tadao's classification is based on the structure of the *renga* and the appearance of the eminent masters and distinguishes the four following phases: 1) the development and emergence of the short *renga* or *tanrenga* (the time of Minamoto no Toshiyori), the so-called 'prehistory', 2) the emergence of the *renga* in the Nanboku period, the time of Gusai 救済 (1284–1378), 3) the accomplishment of Sōgi's *renga* literature (phases 2 and 3 correspond to the collections *Tsukuba shū* 菟玖波集, 'Tsukuba Anthology' and *Shinsen Tsukuba shū* 新撰菟玖波集, 'Newly Selected Tsukuba Anthology') and 4) the transition from *renga* to *haikai*, the era of Jōha, the 'post-history'. See IKEDA 1976: 69.

20 See OKUDA 2017, TSURUSAKI 2010 and WATANUKI 2014.

Renga was practised at all levels of society: from the courts of the emperors to the common people. The local lords of the medieval warrior society were particularly fond of it. In fact, many professional *renga* masters enjoyed their patronage.[21]

In the course of the sixteenth century, the art gradually passed its zenith; the rules became overly complicated and the possibilities of expression depleted. At the same time, as an additional challenge, a variant form of *renga* called 'humorous' or 'non-orthodox' *haikai no renga* 俳諧連歌 developed out of classical *renga* and became an independent art.[22] *Haikai* expanded what was expressible to colloquial speech and more prosaic and mundane themes, which made it gain widespread popularity.

Despite all the prophesies of doom and the challenging nature of *haikai*, the practice of classical *renga* continued throughout the Edo period, however. It was not only practised at the court of the Shōgun as *Edojō renga* 江戸城連歌 ('*Renga* in the Castle of Edo'), also called *Ryūei renga* 柳営連歌 (lit. 'Willow camp *renga*'),[23] but at the residences of the lords who lived in the feudal domains. Most of all, though, it was practised at temples and shrines as votive poetry, called *hōnō renga* 奉納連歌 or *hōraku renga* 法楽連歌 in Japanese. Since linked poetry intended as a votive gift has been extremely underestimated in research so far, some explanatory remarks seem to be appropriate at this point.

As will be explained elsewhere in more detail, the idea that poetry can be an appropriate votive offering to the deities developed from the model of Buddhist votive practices such as copying and reciting sutras and donating

21 See CARTER 1993.

22 One indication of the official establishment of *haikai* as a recognised art is the compilation of the first independent representative *haikai* collection, *Shinsen inu Tsukubashū* ('Newly Selected Mongrel Tsukuba Collection'), the first phase of which was was undertaken in 1524. An early predecessor, the *Chikuba kyōgin shū* 竹馬狂吟集 (lit. 'Collection of Bamboo Horse Mad Poems'), was compiled as early as 1499. The first semi-official *renga* collection, *Tsukuba shū*, compiled in 1356, had a chapter (19) devoted to 'miscellaneous-style renga', including *haikai* verses. The tradition of 'comic' poetry can be traced back to the Heian period (784–1185), when *haikaika* or humourous poems were a counterpart to the serious *waka*. See Shirane 2015: 403. For a history of *haikai no renga*, see ibid.: 403–23.

23 *Ryūei* is a kind of synonym for '*bakufu*'. The *renga* was conducted every year in the first month at the inner citadel of Edo Castle, which is why it was also called *Ryūei renga hajime* 柳営連歌始め ('Willow camp renga beginning'). The practice began with the *Muromachi bakufu*. See TSURUSAKI 2005: 89 and HIROKI 2017: 161.

copies to temples. Likewise, in cults associated with Shintō,[24] performative arts had long been practised to honour and entertain the deities and to pacify spirits. As the Kami were considered 'traces' (*suijaku* 垂迹) of the 'ground' (*honji* 本地) of Buddhist deities, sutra offerings came to be made to the Kami as well, and later *waka* were also thought of as an appropriate gift, following the model of sutra recitation and copying. Subsequently, *renga* poems were composed for reasons of prayer (*kitō renga* 祈祷連歌), in memory of a deceased person (*tsuizen renga* 追善連歌) or following a revelation in a dream (*musō renga* 夢想連歌).[25] Many votive *renga* were held on a regular basis, either monthly *(tsukinami renga)* or as an annual event. What distinguishes votive *renga* from 'normal' linked verse apart from the purpose for which it is made? First of all, the members of the circle may be different, possibly including priests from the shrine whose deities are the recipients of the votive gift. Second, the venue for the gathering is often a building belonging to a temple or shrine. Third, there are some differences in the text itself, such as the *hokku* (first verse), which has some religious or auspicious content. And fourth, paratexts in the right-hand margin of the first sheet recto of a *renga kaishi* or at the beginning of the text in the printed edition such as the date and place (*hashizukuri* 端作), title or subtitle may indicate the votive purpose. The main difference, however, is that the poetry session is followed by a votive ceremony conducted at a temple or shrine, in which the poem is recited (*rōei* 朗詠) or the verses of the first sheet recto before the deities and a calligraphic copy of the poem is donated to the shrine or temple and the deities respectively.[26]

This embedding of *renga* in the culture of rituals and *hōraku* offerings was certainly an important reason why classical linked verse survived until well into the nineteenth century at many shrines even when the art was long past its best.

24 See BREEN / TEEUWEN 2010 for a discussion of the term 'Shintō'.

25 For more on dream revelations in medieval Japanese literature, see QUENZER 2000.

26 The recitation is not necessarily done using a clean copy; it can also be done using a printed version or the notes of the *sōshō* or the scribe. Where the votive ceremony takes place immediately after the poetry session, for example, as was the case with the recitation of the *hōnō renga* at Imahachimangū 今八幡宮 in Yamaguchi in July 2018, a clean copy may not be available yet and the manuscript will only be donated some time after the recitation.

In general, it may be said that the dynamics of change, i.e. people's willingness to switch to *haikai no renga* or to abandon linked poetry altogether, was different in each province of Japan.[27]

Things changed, however, after the so-called 'opening' of Japan by Western powers in the middle of the nineteenth century, the collapse of the Tokugawa *bakufu*, and the Meiji restoration, resulting in profound restructuring of the political system and Japanese society. Moreover, with the introduction of Western knowledge and thought, traditional Japanese aesthetic values also came to be challenged, as was expressed in Masaoka Shiki's (1867–1902) famous saying 'Hokku [= haiku] is literature, renga and haikai are not' (*Hokku wa bungaku nari, renpai wa bungaku ni arazu* 発句は文学なり、連俳は文学に非ず).[28] The separation of Shintō and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri*) after the Meiji restoration seems to have affected the *hōraku renga* as well.[29]

Renga was gradually abandoned now, even at the shrines, although some of them held on to the tradition longer than others, like Dazaifu Tenmangū in Kyūshū and probably circles on Sado Island in Niigata prefecture.[30] But in general, fewer and fewer people were able to perform *renga* as time went on. One of the few remaining practitioners was Yamada Yoshio (1875–1958), who is mainly known to scholars as an eminent linguist. A son of one of the last *renga* masters, Yamada Masao 山田方雄 (?1832–1918), he conducted sessions for practicing in Sendai and Ise, the outcomes of which were published as *Renga aoba shū* ('Renga green leaves collection') in 1941.[31]

By the late 1930s at the latest, however, the tradition of *hōraku renga* was practically extinct all over the country, the only exception being a small parish in the city of Yukuhashi in Fukuoka prefecture (Kyūshū), centring around Imaizu Susa Jinja Shrine 今井津須佐神社 and Jōkiji Temple 浄喜寺.

27 See OZAKI 2013a.

28 In *Bashō zatsudan* 芭蕉雑談 ('Various talks about Bashō'). See YUKUHASHI SHI BUNKA ISAN KASSEIKA JIKKŌ IINKAI 2014: 43. *Renpai* could also mean *haikai no renga*.

29 DAI JŪKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 152.

30 http://blog.livedoor.jp/challengersglory1/archives/51317733.html (viewed on 26/2/2020).

31 See MOROZUMI in KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2005: 52; Konishi Jin'ichi practised *renga* with Yamada (see Brazell's and Cook's introduction to KONISHI 1975, 30), and Hamachiyo Kiyoshi (1924–2000), who was a speaker at the 1981 conference, was also one of Yamada's disciples. See KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2005: 84.

This parish has kept up the tradition of *hōraku renga* for nearly 500 years, beginning in 1530 and continuing it to the present day.[32]

As for the question of why *hōraku renga* can only look back on an unbroken history in Yukuhashi, there are several reasons for this. First of all, in Yukuhashi, *renga* has been incorporated into the Gion festival,[33] which is presently celebrated each summer in July, a festival that includes floats just like the Gion festival in Kyōto, which is better known.[34] During *Gion matsuri* in Yukuhashi these days, two *yoyoshi* are composed over four sessions (twenty-two verses in each one). The first half of the first *yoyoshi* is the *kane oroshi* 鉦おろし(‘gong-beating’) *renga* performed at Kumano Shrine,[35] and the second half is added to it some days later as a *shatō renga* 社頭連歌 on the ‘front veranda’ [before the main hall of worship] *(shatō)* of Imaizu Susa Jinja. The first part of the second *yoyoshi*, the *shajō renga*, is conducted in Jōkiji Temple,[36] and the second part is added as the actual *shajō renga* 車上連歌 or ‘*renga* on the festival float’ several days later. This unique kind of *renga,* for which the *sōshō* and the scribe sit on a festival float while the *renjū* (group) sits on benches and small stools or stands on

32 1530 (Kyōroku 享禄 3) is usually stated as the date when the votive *renga* was included in the Gion festival at Susa Jinja; IMAI GION RENGA NO KAI 2011: 170. The date is according to Dazai Kannai Shi 太宰管内志 (‘Records About the Administrative District of Dazai [Kyūshū with Iki and Tsushima]’), published by the Kokugaku scholar Itō Tsunenari 伊藤常足 (1775−1858) in 1841. See IKEDA 1961: 17. According to Ikeda (ibid. 18), there were occasionally years in which the *hōno renga* could not be practiced. However, this did not lead to a break in tradition.

33 The Gion festival is celebrated in urban communities in Japan where Susano’o is worshipped, the most well-known festival being the one in Kyōto. Susano’o is identified with Gozu Tennō (the ‘ox-head heavenly king’, a deity that is worshipped to prevent diseases and epidemics). Gozu Tennō is also called Gion Sama (as he was initially the protector deity of Jetavana Park near Shravasti (in what is now Uttar Pradesh) in India. Gion festivals were first mentioned in the ninth century and were celebrated in what is now the city of Yukuhashi 行橋市 from the Kamakura period onwards, being one of the ‘three festivals of [the province of] Buzen’, together with the Gion of two nearby cities, Kokura and Nakatsu. See YUKUHASHI SHI REKISHI SHIRYŌKAN 2004.

34 In 2016, thirty-three festivals in Japan that included floats were designated part of the country’s ‘intangible cultural heritage’, or ‘ICH’, by UNESCO. The Yukuhashi Imai Gion festival was among them. See https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/yama-hoko-yatai-float-festivals-in-japan-01059 (viewed on 20/11/2019).

35 This first part of the *yoyoshi* is also called *Hokku sadame narabi ni ichijun* or ‘Deciding the hokku and [conducting] the first round’. See DAI JŪKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 152.

36 This first part of the second *yoyoshi* is also called *Hokku sadame narabi ni ichijun* (‘Deciding the *hokku* and the first round’).

the ground, can only be seen in Yukuhashi. It is also a special kind of *kasagi renga* 笠着連歌, which means basically anybody passing by and 'wearing a straw hat' (*kasagi*) is allowed to participate. As a side note, women are not allowed to enter the place where the first two of the four sessions are held as long as they are taking place. This may be for reasons of tradition, but I was allowed to watch the performance from outside. When the third and fourth session were due to take place, however, I was not only allowed to enter the venue, but I was expected to participate and contribute verses myself.

Second, another key reason for the persistence of *hōraku renga* in Yukuhashi was that it was the responsibility of the shrine parishioners *(ujiko)* associated with Imaizu Susa Jinja Shrine and Jōkiji Temple, as the former head of Imaizu Susa Jinja, Takatsuji Yasuchika 高辻安親 (1933–2004), once pointed out. While Takatsuji claimed other shrines performed the *renga* with the shrine priests in the centre, in Yukuhashi the role of local families – especially the Fukushima and the Murakami family – was quite strong and the duty of performing *renga* was passed on as a family heritage, while the shrine itself had a rather passive role.[37] I believe family tradition is an important point.

Third, as Kuroiwa (2016) has shown, while the *renga* was being abandoned in all the other shrines, Yukuhashi was lucky enough to have some excellent *renga* masters, including descendants of the eminent Satomura lineage,[38] who still continued to attract people eager to become their disciples. Satomura Genseki 玄碩 (?1760/62－1821), the adopted son of Satomura Gensen 里村玄川 (?–1818), lived in Yukuhashi for the last eight years of his life and is also buried there.[39] After WW II, *renga* was continued by Fukushima Nintarō 福島任太郎 (?1906–1976) and Katayama Toyotoshi 片山豊敏, who also compiled a new abridged rule book.[40]

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37 DAI JŪKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI (2003): 155–59.

38 The ancestor of the Satomura family was Satomura Shōkyū 里村昌休 (1510−52). His disciple and heir to the house was Satomura Jōha 里村紹巴 (1525–1602).

39 At the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912), the then *renga* master at Susa Shrine, Shigemura Yoshihiro 重村榮寛(1783–1861), was a leading disciple of Satomura Gensen. Moreover, a member of the Murakami family was a relative of Gensen; see KUROIWA 2016:16. For information on Shigemura, I am indebted to Inoue Yukiko.

40 YUKUHASHI SHI REKISHI SHIRYŌKAN 2004: 10. I could not get any birth-and-death dates for Katayama, but it is said that in the twenties of the Shōwa period, i.e. the late forties or the early fifties of the twentieth century, he went to Kyōto to consult Fukui Kyūzō; see KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 国民文化祭行橋市連歌企画委員会 2005: 211.

However, when Yukuhashi became the last place in Japan where classical *renga* was still being practised, the remaining practitioners found the situation unacceptable, as will be explained below.

An excursus: three types of *renga* manuscripts

Manuscripts serving as carriers of linked poetry have hardly been addressed in research so far.[41] They are, however, an integral part of the ritual procedure in which such poems arise (which is hardly ever discussed either). Any discussion of constants and changes in the tradition of *renga* needs to include written artefacts for this reason.

Three types of paper manuscripts[42] can be distinguished in contemporary *renga* poetry: traditional *renga kaishi*, paper strips (*tanzaku* 短冊), and a standardised two-page form for contemporary *renga* that will be described below. One might add the hanging scrolls (*kakejiku* 掛け軸) displayed in the *renga* rooms as well showing portraits or names, a fourth kind of manuscript relevant to linked poetry circles, but I will not discuss these here as they are not directly involved in the production of *renga* poems.[43]

In medieval and early-modern *renga* sessions, the emerging poem was recorded on *renga kaishi* 連歌懐紙 or 'linked poetry paper' by the scribe, who was the only one to make any records. While the term *renga kaishi* can refer to the sheets of Japanese paper[44] used for recording poems created at *renga* sessions (that is, it denotes the material carrier of the text, sized about 36 × 52 cm),[45] it also refers to the traditional *renga* paper with the verses inscribed on it, that is, the manuscripts.[46] Moreover, *kaishi* is also used as a codicological term denoting the bundle of *origami* on which the *renga* is

41 See KONISHI 1975, HORTON 1993 and BUCK-ALBULET 2021 (forthcoming) for papers in English; for descriptions of *renga* paper in Japanese, see YAMADA 1937, HIROKI 2008 and 2018, KOYAMA 2014, ISHIKAWA 2000 and OZAKI 2013b. Many other papers in Japanese discuss individual artefacts.

42 Digital 'manuscripts' are mentioned below.

43 For a discussion of *kakejiku*, see WATANUKI 2012. I will not deal with wrapping paper and boxes with inscription either.

44 For a short description of certain kinds of paper and the layout of the manuscripts, see BUCK-ALBULET 2021.

45 HIROKI 2015: 90.

46 The term is used this way by many researchers, such as IWASHITA 1993 and 1981 and ISHIKAWA 2000. Also see HIROKI 2010: 64.

written, which is bound together with paper thread, as opposed to scrolls (*maki* 巻, *kanzubon* 巻子本) and booklets (*sasshi* 冊子).

Sheets of *renga* paper were folded lengthwise into two parts (*futatsuori*). A folded sheet or 'fold' (*ori* 折) thus has two pages that are used to write on, a recto (*omote* 表 or shortened: *o* ヲ) and a verso (*ura* 裏 or, shortened: *u* ウ). The size of the folded sheet was approx. 18 × 52 cm. The inner part of this 'folded paper' (*origami*) was not used.[47]

When writing on the *kaishi*, the fold was put on the lower side. One verse was distributed over two lines with the name of the author written beneath the second line. Thus, when unfolded, the writing on each side would be turned upside down.

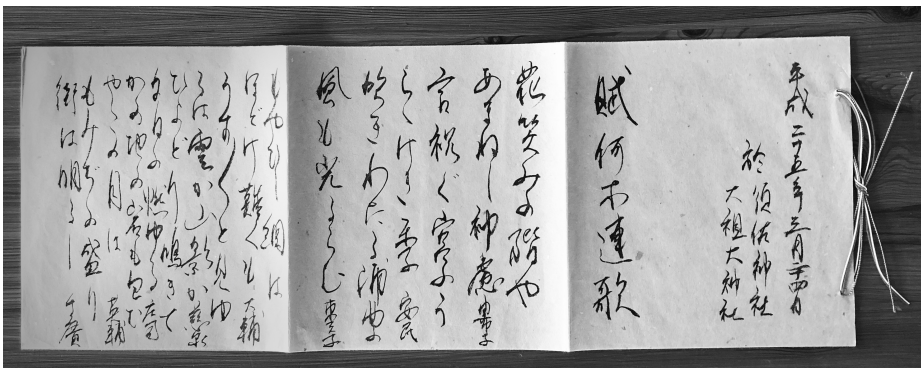

Fig. 2: First sheet recto of a *kaishi* containing the verses of a '*renga* beneath the cherry tree' (*hana no moto renga* 花の下連歌) written, folded and tied with thread in the traditional style. Calligraphy: Inoue Yukiko 井上由希子 (2015). Photo: © Buck-Albulet, 2020.

In the case of a *hyakuin*, four folded sheets or *ori* were used, yielding eight pages.[48] This form of 'four origami sheets' (*origami yonmai*) has probably been in use ever since the thirteenth century.[49] The number of

47 There are, however cases in which the inner part of used *renga kaishi* has been used to write other texts on the paper. These are called *ura monjo* 裏文書 or 'documents on the verso'.

48 The earliest mention of a *hyakuin* dates back to 1200 and is to be found in the *Meigetsuki* ('Record of the Clear Moon'), the diary of Fujiwara Teika (1162–1241). However, the distribution of stanzas was not formalised at that point as described above. See HIROKI 2015: 96.

49 The use of *origami* for *renga* is also mentioned in the *Meigetsuki*, Fujiwara Teika's diary; it is in an entry dating to 1206. HIROKI 2015: 96.

verses for each page became standardised[50] to the effect that the recto page of the first 'fold' (*hatsuori* 初折り) and the verso side of the last 'fold' (*nagori no ori* 名残の折) each had eight verses, while all the other pages had fourteen.

The distribution of verses was as follows:[51]

Sheet or 'fold' (*ori*)	Japanese name		No. of verses
1	s*hoori*, *hatsuori* 初折 *or ichi no ori* 一の折	recto (*omote* 表)	8
		verso (*ura* 裏)	14
2	*ni no ori* 二の折	recto (*omote* 表)	14
		verso (*ura* 裏)	14
3	*san no ori* 三の折	recto (*omote* 表)	14
		verso (*ura* 裏)	14
4	*nagori no ori* 名残の折	recto (*omote* 表)	14
		verso (*ura* 裏)	8

Table 1: The structure of a *hyakuin renga* manuscript

Nearly all the other forms of *renga* are based on this scheme – from the forty-four-verse form (*yoyoshi*) to the one-thousand-verse poem. Only the thirty-six-verse form or *kasen* is different, distributing the verses in a 6-12-12-6 scheme. The fifty-verse form has an 8-12-12-12-6 structure and needs three sheets of paper.[52]

Once this structure was established, it began to influence some of the poetic rules. For example, rules like *ori o kirau* 折を嫌う ('avoiding the [same] fold') or *men o kirau* 面を嫌う ('avoiding the [same] page') de-

50 HIROKI 2010: 64.

51 YAMADA 1937: 2–3.

52 SHIMAZU 2017: 13–14.

manded that certain topics may not appear on the same sheet or the same page and thus were specific forms of the restrictions mentioned above.[53]

When exactly the practice of recording *renga* poems ceased to be the exclusive right of the scribe is not entirely clear and calls for further research.[54] In contemporary *renga*, every member takes notes, including the *sōshō* and scribe, using a form sheet that will be described shortly. It is rare for a scribe in contemporary Japan to write a traditional *kaishi* during the session, but in the summer of 2018, I saw Takatsuji Yasutami 高土安民 taking notes on a form sheet at Kumano Shrine in Yukuhashi, writing in a traditional style at the same time. The paper he used was not traditional *kaishi* format, however, but a continuous sheet of paper.

In the case of a *hōraku renga*, a calligrapher or a skilled group member may be commissioned to write a clean copy in the traditional style on a traditional *kaishi*.[55] Some members also might make clean copies in the traditional style for themselves.

Another type of manuscript is called *tanzaku*. This term refers to individual strips of paper about 6–7.5 × 36 cm[56] in size such as those that were used for recording *waka* poems. These have come to be used in modern *renga* because – contrary to the medieval precedent – in most contemporary circles, verses are submitted by members in written form. The participants write their verses on *tanzaku* and hand them over to the *sōshō* and the scribe, who then discuss them and decide which contributions should be included in the poem. *Tanzaku* are also used for displaying the chosen verses on a wall or whiteboard during the session, and smaller *tanzaku* (often cut from 'recycled' paper) are also used for making drafts and notes. By contrast, in the *renga* circles of Imaizu Susa Jinja and Jōkichi Temple in Yukuhashi, verses are still submitted orally, but even there the participants make use of the standard form sheet to record their poem and use *tanzaku* to make drafts of the verses they intend to submit. Moreover, on solemn occasions, verses may also be written on *tanzaku* made from precious paper.

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53 MITSUTA 1993: 147–48.

54 For a short summary of the state of the art, see BUCK-ALBULET 2021 (forthcoming).

55 The poem created at the Yamaguchi session that I witnessed in July 2018 was written by the calligrapher Suyama Fumiko 陶山芙美子. The calligraphy of the *renga* in Gujō Hachiman in August 2018 was written by Yamada Hakuyō 山田白陽.

56 Some of the *tanzaku* that I brought back from Japan have exactly this size, but there are also smaller ones 21 × 5 cm and 4.2 × 27 cm in size, for example; these are called *kotanzaku*, i.e. 'small *tanzaku*'.

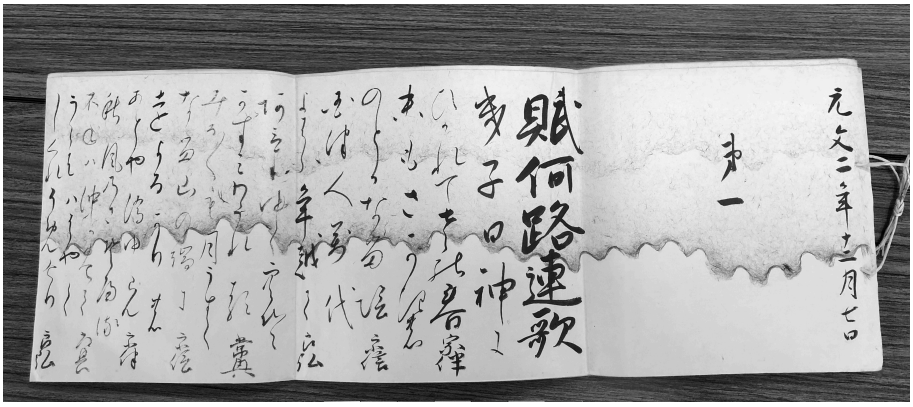

Fig. 3: First recto page of a pre-modern *renga* manuscript. Courtesy of Kumata Shrine, Osaka. Photo: © Buck-Albulet, 2018. The manuscript is dated to the 12th month of Genbun 元文2 (1737) and has the title *Fusu nani michi renga* 賦何路連歌 (lit. 'Insert-what-path *renga*'). A 'number one' (*dai ichi*) is written in the blank space between the date and the title, which suggests that this *renga* is actually part of a thousand-verse *renga* (*senku*).

In present-day *renga*, not only the scribe, but every member of the group makes a record of the poem as the verses get contributed. This goes for the *hōraku renga* in Yukuhashi as well. The third type of manuscript – the two page form – is used for this purpose. The form was developed by Mitsuta Kazunobu to facilitate the process of composing. It is also called *renga kaishi*[57] and it displays the structure of the traditional *kaishi* or the structure of the poem exactly in tabular form. Fig. 4 shows a detail of the first page representing the first sheet recto of a *yoyoshi kaishi*. The first line is for counting the verses, while the second line indicates the special place that is reserved for verses mentioning the moon and cherry blossom. The respective season is entered in the third line as the composing process proceeds. The fourth line is for inscribing the verses. The lower part contains a chart where the poetic subject of each verse can be marked, which helps one to see which subject is allowed to be used for the next link. The last line is for recording the name of the poet. Fig. 5 shows a detail of the second page representing the second sheet recto of a *yoyoshi kaishi*. The table on the left is for the tally (*kuage* 句上), i.e. to count the number of verses each participant produced. *Kuage* is reminiscent of the former ludic character of *renga*.

57 See KUROIWA 2016: 204.

The revival movement

The last remaining community in Yukuhashi practising votive linked poetry triggered a revival movement in the 1980s. The merit for this step is largely due to Takatsuji Yasuchika 高辻安親 (1933–2004), the priest of Imaizu Susa Jinja at the time.[58] He realised that the linked poetry of Imaizu Susa Jinja probably could not be maintained if the number of people capable of composing *renga* remained limited to such a small circle. He then started to contact experts with considerable passive knowledge about linked poetry, namely the literary scholars researching and teaching the history of *renga* at universities.[59] At the time, some of them had never actually written any linked poetry themselves.[60]

Two symposia held in Yukuhashi in 1981 and 2004 became milestones in the history of this revival movement. The first symposium, held on 22–23 November 1981, was to be conducive for a reorientation and repositioning of the art. Besides Priest Takatsuji, the speakers were all distinguished researchers in literary history: Hamachiyo Kiyoshi 浜千代清, Tanamachi Tomoya 棚町知弥, Shimazu Tadao 島津忠夫, Usuda Jingorō 臼田甚五郎 and Kaneko Kinjirō 金子金次郎. The main topic of the 1981 symposium was how it would be possible to maintain or revive the art and how it could be promoted and spread again. Interestingly, one big issue at the symposium was how to distinguish *renga* from *haikai* or *renku*,[61] as contemporary *haikai* is called. It also became clear that some adaptations were necessary, and a number of innovations were adopted at and after this symposium.

58 According to KUROIWA 2016: 208, a 'Susa Jinja Renga Circle' 須佐神社連歌の会 started as early as 1974 with Ikeda Tomizō 池田富蔵 acting as its *sōshō*.

59 Incidentally, this strategy is a remarkable parallel to the development of poetry and poetics in the Edo period when poets striving to enhance their knowledge of classical poetry turned to philological studies.

60 See Tsurusaki Hiro'o's or Ozaki Chika's recollections in IMAI GION RENGA NO KAI 2011: 251 and 253, for example.

61 The term *renku* replaced *haikai* in the early twentieth century (JONSSON 2016: 3). It was already used in the Edo period to distinguish it from the first verse or *hokku*. *Renku* should not be confused with the term *rengu* 聯句 (Chin. *lianju*), a form of linked poetry practised in China from the time of the Six Dynasties to the Tang period, or with *wakan rengu* 和漢聯句, a mixed form alternately using Chinese and Japanese that was practised in pre-modern Japan. See OGATA 2009: 992.

Another point that was discussed at the 1981 symposium was that women should become more involved in the circles' activities in future.[62]

The 2004 symposium speakers and panelists were Shimazu Tadao, who gave the keynote lecture, Morozumi Sōichi 両角倉一, Mitsuta Kazunobu 光田和伸 and Baba Akiko 馬場あき子. The genre identity of the *renga* was still a subject and so was the question of its demarcation from *haikai/renku*, but more than twenty years after the first symposium, the level of discourse was much more advanced. Moreover, whereas in 1981 only one *kasen* or thirty-six-verse *renga* was composed after the symposium, the 2004 symposium was followed by a 'grand *renga* convention' (*Renga jissaku taikai* 連歌実作大会), with eleven *za* 座 or 'seats', i.e. *renga* circles performing simultaneously.

In general, the topics of the revival movements can be summarised under three headings: reflection, adaptation and promotion:

(1) *Reflections* on what modern *renga* should be like called for an examination of the historical model. As mentioned above, many of the members of *renga* circles have an academic background and are able to do philological research on historical precedents to understand the history of *renga* more fully. While there were lectures on the origin of *renga* (Usuda Jingorō) in the 1981 symposium, for example, and Western philologists' interest in classical *renga* was briefly mentioned (Kaneko Kinjirō),[63] it is also interesting to note that the participants at both conferences seemed to be especially interested in a particular era, namely the time when the *haikai* emerged from classical *renga*. This comes as no surprise as anyone learning about the history and identity of *renga* was automatically confronted with *haikai* and its eminent masters, especially Matsuo Bashō. Another eminent *renga* master to be discussed at the symposia was Nishiyama Sōin 西山宗因 (1605–82), Basho's teacher, who lived in Kyūshū for some time.[64] Being a practitioner

62 The 120 participants at the 2018 symposium included about twenty women. According to Kaneko Kinjirō, there were female *renga* masters in the Kamakura period, in the brief Ōei period (1394–1428), in the Edo period, but not in the Sengoku period. Cf. DAI JŪKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 65. For a history of women in *renga*, see OKUDA 1995.

63 Kaneko reported on an encounter with Earl Miner in Japan in 1978 and an encounter with Alexander Slavik in Vienna in 1979. See DAI JŪKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 50–51.

64 KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2005: 17.

of *renga* and *haikai* and a founder of the Danrin school of *haikai*, he literally embodied both poetic traditions.[65]

Much of the reflection on contemporary *renga* took place in light of the history of *renga*, but another influential factor was the poetic rules of *haikai* or *renku*, as the contemporary form of *haikai*-style *renga* is called. In addition to using distinct vocabulary, the linking techniques used were also distinguished from those employed in *renku*.[66]

Occasional round-table discussions (*zadan kai* 座談会) have also encouraged reflection – at Kumata Shrine in Ōsaka in 1993, for example, and again in 2010. The topics that were discussed at the 1993 round table included the history of *renga* in Yukuhashi and the revival of it at Kumata Shrine, the situation of classical *renga* against the backdrop of the '*renku* boom' (a phenomenon that was already current by the time the 1981 symposium took place), the vocabulary of *renga*, especially the demand of 'beautiful Japanese' for *hōraku renga*, the role of the *sōshō* and scribe, and the handling of 'seasons words' (*kigo* 季語).[67]

(2) *Adaptation* to modern needs: The participants at the symposia were fully aware that some formal adaptations would be necessary to adjust *renga* to the needs of contemporary poets. The three main measures can be described by three terms: reduction of the standard form, systematisation of the rules, and the inclusion of *renku*-style verses.

Sheet or 'fold' (*ori*)	Japanese name		No. of verses
1	s*hoori*, *hatsuori* 初折 *or ichi no ori* 一の折	recto (*omote* 表)	8
		verso (*ura* 裏)	14
2	*nagori no ori* 名残の折	recto (*omote* 表)	14
		verso (*ura* 裏)	8

Table 2: Structure of a *yoyoshi renga* manuscript

65 On Nishiyama's attitude to *renga* and *haikai*, see OZAKI 2018.

66 KOKUMIN BUNKAS YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2005: 84.

67 I follow the summary made by Yamamura Noriko, who chaired the 2010 round table. See KUMATA JINJA 2012: 229–32.

(a) Reduction: The 100-verse poem (*hyakuin*), which had been the standard form[68] until the nineteenth century, was replaced by the forty-four-verse poem (*yoyoshi*) that had previously existed, but was now set as the new standard. It is interesting to note that there is also a structural aspect to this decision: the reason for selecting the *yoyoshi* was that it was more appropriate to the structure of the *renga kaishi* than the fifty verses or *han hyakuin* 半百韻 form that had also been practised for some time. The *yoyoshi* had one decisive advantage: it was more in line with the system. Keeping basically the same distribution of eight verses on the first sheet recto and the last sheet verso and fourteen on the other pages, the forty-four-verse *renga* hardly differed from the *hyakuin* at all apart from the fact that the two folded sheets in the middle had been taken out.[69]

Another reason for choosing the *yoyoshi* may have been that the thirty-six-verse form or *kasen* was not an option: this was the form that had been chosen by the *haikai* poets to set themselves apart from classical *renga*.

(b) Systematisation of the rules: Medieval and early-modern *renga* was based on a rule book that was written in 1372 and served as a standard reference for centuries: the *Renga shinshiki* 連歌新式 or 'New Rules for Renga'[70] by Nijō Yoshimoto 二条良基 (1320–88), based on advice from his master, Gusai 救済 (1284–1378).[71] In the course of time, however, more and more poetic rules and commentaries had been added, making later editions of the book confusing and harder to use. The revision of the rules is the work of Mitsuta Kazunobu, who systematised the semantic categories (*budate* 部立) in the 1990s[72] along with the rules about how often a certain category may appear (*kukazu* 句数) and the rules about how many verses were allowed between two verses in the same category (*kusari* 句去),[73] which are found in *Renga shinshiki*. Mitsuta arranged these in several sche-

68 In the Edo period it was common for a *hyakuin* to be composed every day during the Gion festival in Yamaguchi. (Information given by Ozaki Chika in July 2018.)

69 DAI JŪKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 141.

70 Also known as *Ōan shinshiki* 応安新式 ('New rules for the Ōan era') to distinguish it from later adaptations by different authors. See CARTER 1983.

71 HIROKI 2010: 300.

72 See MITSUTA 1993 and 1996.

73 In pre-modern poetics, terms like *sarikirai* 去り嫌い ('intermission'), *rinne* 輪廻 ('recurrence') and *uchikoshi o kirau* 打越を嫌う('to clash') were used to describe rules and restrictions of this kind. See CARTER (1983), HIROKI (2010): 53, 120, 290 and CARLEY 2015.

matic representations.[74] He discussed this system at the 2004 symposium.[75] Based on his research on *Renga shinshiki*, Mitsuta also developed the aforementioned form sheet, which is now being used in all of the *renga* circles that I went to see in 2018 (sometimes with some minor modifications). The form is not only a tool for recording a new poem, but a practical guide that, together with the schematic representations, helps poets to keep track of the rules and possibilities of the next verse to be submitted.

(c) Inclusion of *renku* style: It is likely that the decision was made to allow modern *renku* style in the 'inner' part of a *renga* because it was too much to expect from modern poets to be experienced enough to compose a whole *renga* in classical Japanese. The modern style was to be employed for at least a number of verses while using classical language and vocabulary in the rest of the poem. This arrangement is connected with the form of the traditional *renga kaishi* as well: the first twelve and the last eight verses are supposed to be fashioned in a classical style.[76] In terms of a manuscript's layout, this would mean that the classical verses expressed in elegant *yamatokobota* 大和言葉, which is considered to be the appropriate speech for votive gifts to the deities,[77] are on the outer, visible part of the manuscript. Creating a new rule for modern *hōraku renga*, it was decided that the last verse (*ageku*) should always end with an auspicious term written in *kanji* (*kanjidome* 漢字留め),[78] like the verse *Totsukuni hito mo kotobugu ya haru* 外つ国人も言祝ぐや春 ('This spring when somebody from a foreign country [or province] also says words of celebration'), the *ageku* of the 2018 festival float *renga* in Yukuhashi.

(3) *Promoting* renga: While, as mentioned above, the activities of dedicated individuals were and still are a decisive factor in the revival of *renga*, there were also heritage policy frameworks at the local, municipal, prefectural, national and international levels that fostered these individual measures and events, or vice versa, the protagonists of the revival movement made these framework conditions the occasion for their respective actions.

74 See YUKUHASHI SHI BUNKA ISAN KASSEIKA JIKKŌ IINKAI 2014: 24–25; KOKUMIN BUN-KASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA IINKAI 2005: 100.

75 KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2005: 57–70.

76 See IMAI GION RENGA NO KAI 2011: 8.

77 KUROIWA 2012: 7.

78 DAI JŪKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 141.

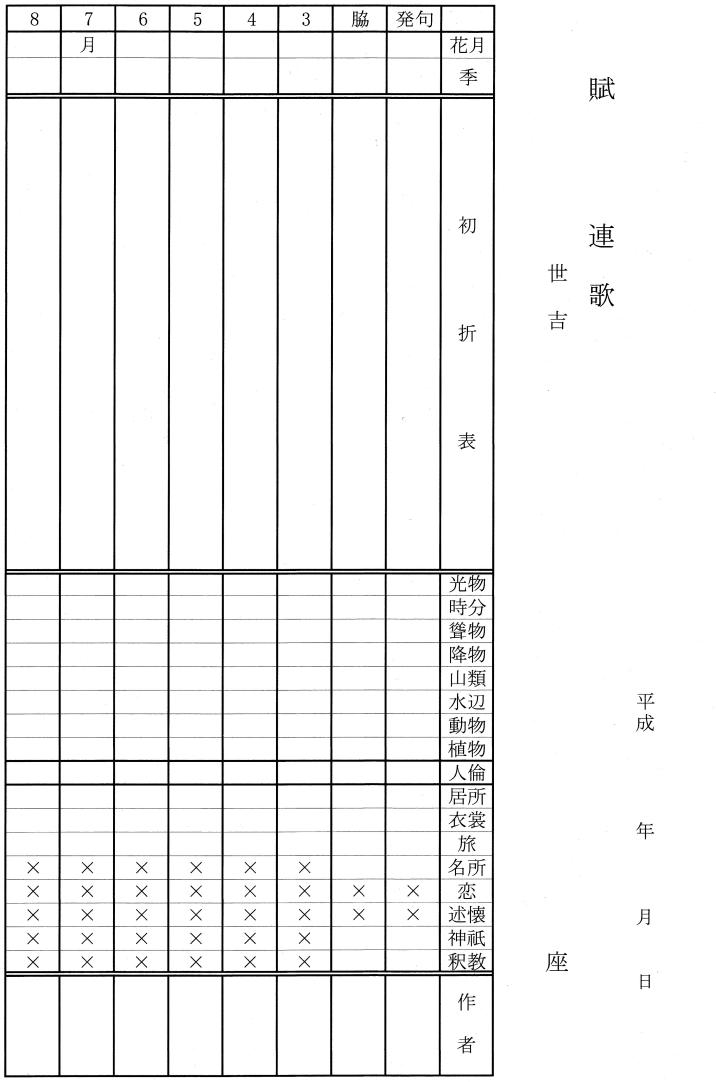

Fig. 4: Detail of the form sheet developed by Mitsuta Kazunobu, representing the first sheet recto of a traditional *yoyoshi kaishi*. The crossed-out fields refer to poetic topics that are not allowed at this point. Courtesy of Mitsuta Kazunobu. The form is included in YUKUHASHI SHI BUNKA ISAN KASSEIKA JIKKŌ IINKAI 2014.

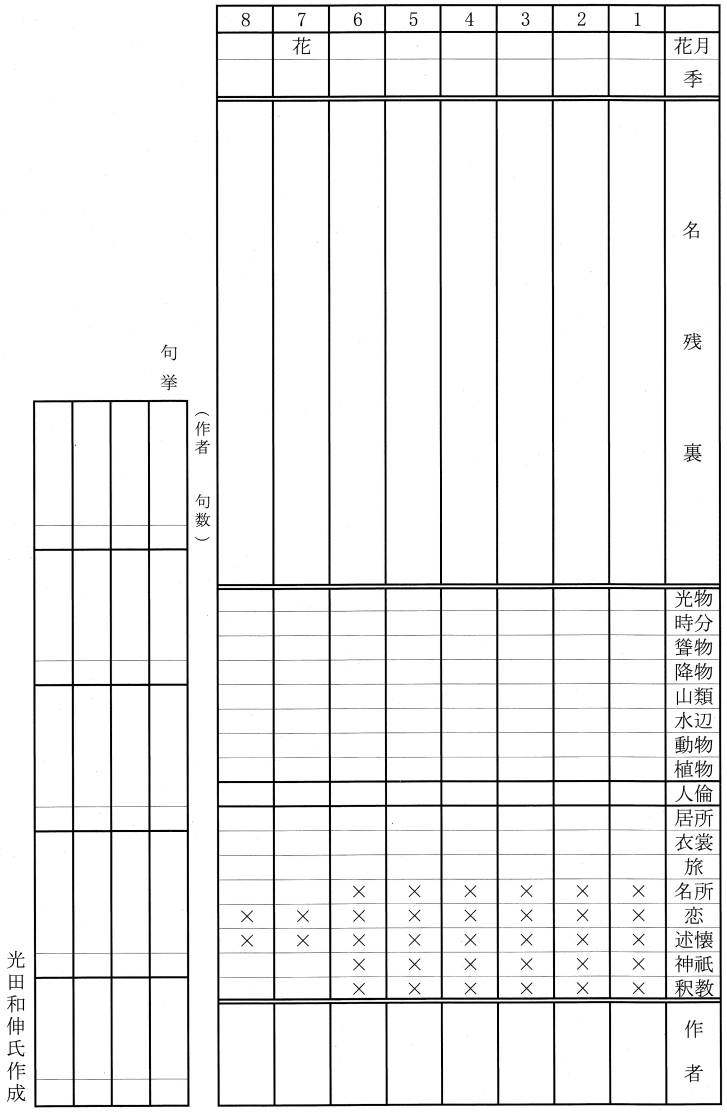

Fig. 5: Detail of the form sheet developed by Mitsuta Kazunobu, representing the second sheet verso of a traditional *yoyoshi kaishi*. Courtesy of Mitsuta Kazunobu.

The 1981 symposium was held to celebrate the 'Shōwa period [re-] construction' (*Shōwa no gozōei* 昭和のご造営) of Imaizu Susa Jinja Shrine. The second symposium in 2004 was embedded in the 19th National Cultural Festival,[79] *Kokumin bunkasai* 国民文化祭, a festival that was inaugurated in 1986. Intended to be staged by another prefecture every year, it was held in Fukuoka prefecture in 2004. It was in this year that *renga* was first included officially as one of the arts performed at the festival.

Festivals are also another opportunity for networking and strengthening bonds between circles in different parts of Japan. On the occasion of the twenty-sixth *Kokumin bunkasai*, which was held in Kyōto prefecture in 2011, many members of *renga* circles in other parts of Japan took part, for instance, from Yamaguchi, several cities in Fukuoka prefecture, and the Hirano hōraku renga circle at Kumata Shrine in Osaka.

Renga conventions were launched and special conventions for school children started to be held. 'Seats' (*za*) for secondary-school pupils were held as early as 2003, for example.[80]

Following the example of Yukuhashi, *renga* circles started to be held in other parts of Japan as well such as Kumata Shrine in Osaka, where *renga* gatherings have been held again since 1987,[81] in Yamaguchi, where a starting point was created by holding the National Renga Assembly or *Zenkoku renga taikai* 全国連歌大会,[82] and in Gujō Hachiman in Gifu prefecture (Yamatochō at that time), where *renga* has been practised since 1990.[83] The annual summer *renga* assembly there is known as the '*Renga* for the commemoration of the performance of the Takigi nō "Kurusu cherry blossom" and for a votive renga to Myōken' (薪能くるす桜上演記念・妙見法楽連歌 *Takigi nō*[84] *Kurusu sakura jōen kinen Myōken hōraku renga*).[85]

Moreover, there were also competitions like the 'open call for a third verse' (*daisan ku kōbo* 第三句公募), based on a *hokku* and the second verse

79 The inauguration of this festival was preceded by a pupils' festival that was started in 1974. See KUROIWA 2016: 208.

80 KUROIWA 2016: 208.

81 TSURUSAKI 2012: 88. After that, *renga* also spread to Kyōto, Mie, Dazaifu, Koga (Ibaraki prefecture), Matsuyama (Ehime prefecture, Shikoku) and other parts of Japan.

82 A National Renga Assembly or *Zenkoku renga taikai* was held in Yamaguchi in 2006. KUROIWA 2016: 39.

83 Another *renga* circle in Gifu prefecture is held in Ibigawachō. Mail from Inoue Yukiko 井上由希子 from 22/9/2019.

84 *Nō* theatre that is played outside in the evening in the light of torches.

85 http://kokindenjunosato.blogspot.com/2015/04/25.html (14/11/2019).

(*wakiku* 脇句) of a solitary *renga* (*dokugin* 独吟) by Nishiyama Sōin 西山宗因 (1605–1682), which he is believed to have donated to Imaizu Susa Jinja in a manuscript written in his own hand (lit. 'his own brush', *jihitsu de* 自筆で).[86] The winners were announced on 6 November 2004, the first day of the second symposium.[87]

Another competition was the 'Box *Renga*', which started in 2003. Using two boxes as collection points at the station and at Kosumeito, a cultural centre in Yukuhashi, verses for a *yoyoshi* were collected over a period of about ten months, starting with the first three verses by Tsurusaki Hiro'o, Takatsuji Yasuchika and Wakabayashi Rieko.[88]

Printing was also an important factor in promoting *renga*. Not only were papers from the two symposia printed, but the poems that emerged from the *renga* circles held at the conventions were, too. One of the most widely spread print products in all the circles that I visited was a small booklet one could call a *renga* primer and reference work in one. The title of it is 'Let's compose *renga* together' みんなで詠もう連歌 (*Minna de yomō renga*), edited by a group named the 'Cultural Heritage Revitalisation Executive Committee of the City of Yukuhashi' 行橋市文化遺産活性化実行委員会 (Yukuhashi Shi Bunka Isan Kassei Ka Jikkō Iinkai).

In January 1996, a 'newspaper *renga*' appeared in the Osaka edition of the *Asahi Shinbun*, a one-year regular feature with Tsurusaki Hiro'o selecting the best of the verses contributed. Later, some of the authors joined the Hirano *hōraku renga* circle.

Finally, education is also a seminal means for spreading the practice. During my research trip, I met particularly dedicated individuals like Yamamura Noriko who make visits to primary schools together with members of the *renga* group at the library in Hirano Ward in Osaka to teach the children *renga*. The same group holds a children's *renga* workshop every summer at Hirano Ward Library. This is also conducted as a kind of *kasagi renga*, as children passing by to borrow books are asked to contribute a verse. The special thing about this event is that the children do not really write any 'linking' verses, but the individual verses submitted by the children on *tanzaku* are combined afterwards by the adults to form a *renga*. And most re-

86 This manuscript no longer exists, but the text can be found in the second volume of the collected edition of Nishiyama's works. See SHIMAZU 2005: 15–17.

87 The chosen verses and a review of each one can be found in KOKUMIN BUNKA SAIKŌ YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2005: 133–57.

88 KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI KIKAKU IINKAI 2005: 159–97.

cently, teach-the-teacher activities have started to train experts in how to teach *renga*.

What stayed the same and what changed?

So what exactly has remained of classical *renga* in contemporary Japan? For the most part, the language is still classical Japanese (in the sense described above) and therefore one could also speak of modern *renga* as being 'neoclassical'. The orthography, too, follows the old rules of historical *kana* orthography.[89] One concession to the present age is the approval of *haikai* vocabulary in the inner part of the poem. The structure of the poem (and hence that of the *kaishi*) has stayed the same for more than half a millennium,[90] and the poetic rules – although systematised and modernised now – follow the authority of the *Renga shinshiki*, a book written in 1372. Finally, traditional *renga* manuscripts are still produced occasionally by people practising calligraphy either for personal use or for the sake of making a votive offering.

In contemporary *renga* circles, however, pencil (or the erasable ink pen) and biro have replaced the brush. Every member takes notes, and in all the circles I visited in 2018, this meant writing by hand, making use of *tanzaku* and the form sheet developed by Mizuta Kazunobu (or a slightly modified form of it). Reference works and electronic dictionaries are rarely missing in these gatherings. Tablets and laptops are also used for reference purposes by some members and masters, but I have not seen any groups yet that have replaced the paper form sheet with an electronic device (even though this scenario was described in a fictional *renga* circle in a crime novel by Kinoshita Takashi[91]).

Moreover, in neoclassical *renga*, as in its medieval model, the 'first round' (*ichijun* 一巡) is often conducted in such a way that each participant contributes a verse. Then there is a switch to the competitive method (*degachi* 出勝, lit. 'to come out and win'): theoretically, every member of the group can now suggest a verse for every 'link'. The master and the writer then choose the best one. The scribe may collect the 'first round' in advance by telephone, e-mail or instant messaging, thereby practising a modern form

89 DAI JUKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 137.

90 BUCK-ALBULET 2021 (forthcoming).

91 KINOSHITA 2018.

of the medieval *ichijun bako* 一巡箱 or 'first-round box', i.e. the practice of sending a messenger round with a box to collect the verses for the first round prior to the actual session.[92] There are also whole poems created on the internet or by instant messaging (usually using an app called LINE in Japan), thus relocating the *za* to virtual space.

The one-hundred-verse form or *hyakuin* has now been replaced by the *yoyoshi*, the forty-four-verse form. Concerning the procedure, modern *renga* sessions are much less ritualised today. Probably the most serious rupture in the tradition occurred in the field of recitation (*rōei* 朗詠). As the last great masters passed away, the knowledge of how exactly they had recited their poems was lost.[93] People are aware of this and no contemporary master or scribe would ever pretend that his or her style of recitation is ancient.

Votive linked poetry was seminal for the revival of classical *renga*. As Takatsuji Yasuchika has put it, *renga* has survived as a Shintō ritual (*jinji*) in Yukuhashi.[94] As mentioned above, votive *renga* involves creating a poem, reciting it before the deities and offering a hand-written copy or *renga kaishi* 連歌懐紙 to the temple or shrine. These manuscripts may be less lavishly decorated than some of their medieval predecessors, but in terms of their style and layout they do indeed follow the ancient model (see fig. 1 and 2).

In some cases, if the *kaishi* is being written for one's own use, the calligrapher will not necessarily follow the two-sheet or two-*ori* style, but might create a *kaishi* similar to the traditional format in shape and size, but written on continuous paper. One *kaishi*, for example, which the author of this essay received as a gift, is written on such paper. Only the front side was used to write the verses on it. As a result, unlike the traditional format, the writing direction is the same for all text. However, the 8-14-14-8 structure was maintained and marked by paratexts (e.g. *u* ウ for *ura* or 'verso' side), blank lines, and folding of the paper.

The calligrapher may also use coloured paper or add paintings himself (the latter is called *e'iri kaishi* 絵入り懐紙 '*kaishi* with paintings inserted').

92 HIROKI 2010, 43.

93 Contemporary *renga* recitators follow styles from other arts they are acquainted with like *utai*, *norito*, *shōmyō* or *shigin* 詩吟 recitation. According to Yamamura Noriko 山村規子 (e-mail from 23 May 2018), the recitation style of Hamachiyo Kiyoshi 浜千代清 (1924–2000) was like Ise ondo 伊勢音頭 or utai.

94 DAI JUKYŪKAI KOKUMIN BUNKASAI YUKUHASHI SHI RENGA KIKAKU IINKAI 2003: 142.

Fig. 6: *Kane oroshi renga* in Yukuhashi (Fukuoka) conducted on 14 July 2018, the opening event of the *renga* series at the Gion festival. The *sōshō* was Arikawa Yoshihiro 有川宜博 (in the middle) and Takatsuji Yasutami 高辻安民 the scribe (to the right). This is probably the most traditional form of a contemporary *renga* gathering. (The name *kane oroshi renga* comes from the custom of beating a gong at the end of the session, after the votive recitation.) Photo: © Buck-Albulet, 2018.

Being a member of CSMC in Hamburg, the starting point of my research was to find out more about the manuscripts that emerged during a *renga* session in medieval Japan. During my research trip in 2018, I realised that *renga* circles are still active in Japan or are active again now and therefore broadened the scope of my research to include contemporary *renga*. Manuscript research as it is understood at CSMC also covers the significance that manuscripts once had or still have in the cultural environment they are part of. Studying *renga* manuscripts would indeed make little sense without taking into account their history, performativity, rituality and properties as elements of group activities, which are all points I have tried to summarise briefly in this paper. How significant are manuscripts in contemporary *renga*, then? How has the revival movement affected the material aspect of linked poetry?

As we have seen, the strict ritual handling of paper that used to be observed in medieval *renga* circles is no longer practised. Instead, contemporary *renga* witnessed a diversification of manuscripts, including new forms as well as the traditional one in certain cases; some *renga kaishi* are simply created for aesthetic reasons by people who enjoy doing calligraphy. Another point worth mentioning here is that the tradition of *hōraku* or making a votive offering also helped to preserve the cultural technique of writing *renga kaishi* as donating the manuscript to the shrine or temple is part of the votive practice. In this case, the *kaishi* usually follow the format of a medieval model fairly closely. In the digital era, new media and new technical possibilities have paved the way for new forms of *renga*, like newspaper, internet or messenger *renga*. However, these virtual spaces are still only a marginal phenomenon; a real 'meeting place' or *za* is the rule for *renga* circles. And even in the digital era, when electronic devices are added to the tools used in and outside the sessions, paper manuscripts are still a vital and indispensable part of the culture of producing *renga* poetry – and that also means writing *renga* by hand and, in many cases, employing the art of calligraphy.

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